

“REMEMBER THE MAINE!” THE EXPLOSION OF THE U.S.S. MAINE

Directions: Newspapers are an important source for studying history. Shown here is the front page of the *New York Journal* for February 17, 1898. Read the selection below and study the newspaper headline. Then answer the questions that follow.

On February 17, 1898, the American battleship *Maine* was blown up in the harbor of Havana, Cuba. For several years, Cuba had been fighting for its independence from Spain. President McKinley had tried to keep the United States out of this war. He had sent the *Maine* to Havana only to protect American citizens there. Shortly after the *Maine* exploded and sunk, several American newspapers reported the event and placed all the blame on Spain. These newspapers, including the *New York Journal*, stirred up bitter feelings among Americans. As a result, members of Congress who favored Cuba were able to force President McKinley to declare war on Spain.



1. What facts about the sinking of the *Maine* are reported in this cover from the *New York Journal*?

2. What opinions about the sinking of the *Maine* are expressed in this cover from the *New York Journal*?

3. Why do you think newspapers like the *New York Journal* had so much influence in the late 1800s?

Directions: *The explosion of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor touched off the Spanish-American War. Speculations as to the cause of the explosion, which was never precisely determined, became a national obsession. Possible causes of the explosion included a coal fire caused by inferior coal or improper storage; a mine planted on board by an intruder who eluded the ship's security; a mine planted by Spain at the spot where Spanish authorities instructed the Maine to anchor; or, a floating mine placed by Cuban insurgents. Read the excerpts below, noting each commentator's conclusion about the explosion. Then, answer the questions that follow.*

"There is an intense difference of opinion as to the cause of the blowing up of the *Maine*. In this, as in everything else, the opinion of the individual is determined by his original bias. If he is a conservative, he is sure that it was an accident; if he is a jingo [extreme patriot], he is equally sure that it was by design."

- Secretary of the Navy, John Long

"I don't propose to be swept off my feet by the catastrophe. My duty is plain. We must learn the truth and endeavor, if possible, to fix the responsibility. The country can afford to withhold its judgment and not strike an avenging blow until the truth is known. The [McKinley] Administration will go on preparing for war, but still hope to avert it."

- President William McKinley

"The *Maine* was sunk by an act of dirty treachery on the part of the Spaniards I believe."

- Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt

"The cause of the blowing up of the ship will not be known until divers go down and examine the wreck. If their investigation show that the indentation of the hull is inward, the conclusion that the magazine room [ammunition storage room] was exploded by a bomb or torpedo placed beneath the vessel is inevitable. If the indentation is outward, it will be indicated that the first explosion was in the magazine [room]."

- New York World Reporter Sylvester Scovel

"I think the explosion occurred on the port side...under the ship."

- Ensign Wilfred Powelson, Navy Investigator

"I have no knowledge as to what the findings of this court will be but I do not fear anything which will reflect on the *Maine*."

- Captain Charles Sigsbee, Captain of the *Maine*

Task:

- a) determine the basis for each man's opinion
- b) who believed the explosion was a result of sabotage
- c) what do you think caused the explosion of the *Maine* and why do you believe that